

WYCOMBE OWE IT TO LARRY

BUT for an incredible series of missed chances by leading scorer Tony Amos, Wycombe Wanderers would have recorded a convincing victory over Bracknell Town in Saturday's Berks and Bucks semi-final replay at Loakes Park. Instead they had to rely on a solitary 20th minute goal by Larry Pritchard to put them through to the Easter Monday (April 23) final against Slough or Wokingham.

However, despite the narrow victory margin, Wycombe never looked in any danger of defeat against a Bracknell side unable to repeat its heroic feats of the previous week.

Indeed Blues' goalkeeper Peter Spittle coming into the side for John Maskell (injured in training), did not have one direct shot to save throughout the 90 minutes. His work consisted of cutting out two crosses and receiving a limited supply of backpasses.

With Larry Pritchard and Alan Gane dominant in mid-field, Wycombe were able to produce a constant flood of attacks on the Bracknell goal. But a combination of missed chances and stern defence by backs Iain MacPhee and John Donnachie prevented Wycombe's superiority from being turned into goals.

Up front Bracknell were never in the hunt. Dave Bullock marshalled flu-stricken Gordon Wilkinson with calm assurance while Paul Birdseye, Derek Gamblin and John Delaney had time to combine with their mid-field colleagues to produce openings for front runners Tony Horseman, Amos and Micky Holifield.

An example of this came after only four minutes when Gamblin sent the ball through to Holifield. But the winger fired wide from a narrow angle.

Blues were in such a commanding mood that Bracknell took nine minutes even to escape from their own half. And even then Wycombe immediately returned the ball upfield to force their first corner.

Pritchard fired just over following a fine move, before giving the home side the lead in the 20th minute. Birdseye broke down the right and crossed. Amos stepped over the ball and Pritchard hit it home from 15 yards.

By **MICHAEL KNOX; Wycombe 1, Bracknell 0**

Wycombe supporters expected a glut of goals from their side following this breakthrough and they would have obliged but for some startling misses from Amos.

In the 25th minute, when clear of Town's defence the bustling centre-forward sliced his shot at least 10 yards wide. Then one minute later Delaney and Pritchard left Amos just five yards out with only the goalkeeper to beat. But again his shot failed to test goalkeeper John Alder.

Before the interval Wycombe forced numerous corners, but it was at this stage that MacPhee showed his true class. He remained ice cool and saved his outstretched defence time and time again.

Even so it would have been no surprise had Wycombe increased their lead. Delaney had one shot blocked by Donnachie and headed just wide from Horseman's corner, while Gane blasted over after seizing on a mistake by Dewick.

Six minutes into the second half Spittle came into action for the first time, when gathering a cross from the right by Barnard. But all the play revolved around the Bracknell penalty area.

Wycombe appeared to have increased their lead in the 62nd minute when Horseman netted. Referee Mr. Balchin whistled for a goal, but then disallowed it for handball after consulting his linesman.

Four minutes later, Horseman, who has recently been suffering

from a foot injury, was replaced by John Hutchinson. But this made little difference to Wycombe's fortunes.

Pritchard, once again Wycombe's best player, continued to stretch the Bracknell defence and went desperately close to adding a second from a free-kick in the 75th minute. But his fine effort was tipped over the bar by Alder.

Although they rarely looked like scoring, Bracknell needed every second in their bid for an equaliser. Thus it seemed pointless of Colin Hopkins to kick the ball away, when a decision was awarded against him in the 78th minute. He was rightly booked.

Mr. Balchin later noted the name of Alan Gane for the same offence, although the Wycombe player was a shade unlucky as he was attempting to clear at the time of the whistle.

Amos, put through by Pritchard, shot wide from a narrow angle in a period of sustained Wycombe pressure while Holifield hit the side netting from Hutchinson's pass.

But Bracknell nearly grabbed a last minute equaliser for the second successive week, when Gamblin almost turned the ball into his own net from Barnard's centre. But there was no forward following up and the full-back was able to clear the danger.

Amos, who had earlier knocked himself out when attempting an overhead scissors kick, reserved his most spectacular miss for injury time. With only the goalkeeper to beat, he delayed his shot far too long and saw Elderfield clear the ball off the line. Holifield latched on to the rebound but Alder turned it round for Wycombe's umpteenth corner.

Wanderers will need to be on much sharper form in the final if they are to beat their probable opponents Slough, who will be attempting a hat-trick of wins in the competition.

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle; P. Birdseye, D. Gamblin, D. Bullock, J. Delaney, R. Williams, M. Holifield, L. Pritchard, A. Amos, A. Gane, A. Horseman (sub: H. Hutchinson 66 mins).

BRACKNELL: J. Alder; B. Elderfield, C. Hopkins, J. Donnachie, I. MacPhee, W. Dewick, J. Woodcock, A. Jeffries, J. Squires, G. Wilkinson, T. Barnard. Sub: C. Gaffney (not used).

Referee: Mr. K. Balchin (Maidenhead).

Half-time: 1-0. Scorer — L. Pritchard (20).

Attendance: 1,412.



Tony Amos's knock out blow on Saturday. Attempting a scissors kick, he hit the ball into his face and took several minutes to recover. To complete an unhappy match for the leading goalscorer, Tony missed a string of chances which would have sewn the game up for Wycombe.